

## THE NOTION OF THE SUPERMAN IN KAZANTZAKIS'S *ZORBA THE GREEK*

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### ABSTRACT

In his book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche shows the features of the superman and makes Zarathustra his superman. Nikos Kazantzakis projects the features of Nietzsche's superman on the character of Zorba in his novel *Zorba The Greek*. This study aims at analyzing how Zorba is depicted as a superman by comparing him to Zarathustra. The study concludes that Kazantzakis's Zorba is a pure representative of the superman according to Nietzsche's criteria.

**KEYWORDS:** Apollonian and Dionysian Principles, Self Assertion, Superman, Nietzsche, Nihilism

### INTRODUCTION

The notion of the superman is one of Nietzsche's most important achievements. In his book *The Philosophy Of Nietzsche*, Mcdaniel shows and comments on the features of the superman as Nietzsche reveals them in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Nietzsche believes that the common man has to overcome in order to make the superman. In Nietzsche's point of view the overman represents the meaning or the essence of life since he is concerned with worldly pleasures unlike those who focus on the afterworld and ignore the demands of the body. In Nietzsche's time there was a prevailing idea which is the death of god. If there is no god, this means that there is no authority to set moral rules and therefore everything is futile; so people were terrified from the horror of nihilism. In this light one can understand the reason for Nietzsche's creation of the overman to redeem humanity from chaos. (1965, 21)

#### Statement of the Problem

The superman must have certain characteristics. Since he believes in the death of god, he creates his own moral system. He strongly believes in the idea of the eternal recurrence, aims at creating a sort of balance between the Apollonian and Dionysian ways of life and is concerned with achieving self assertion which leads to benefiting humanity as a whole. (" Nietzsche's idea of an overman", n.d.). This study aims at examining Zorba's character as Kazantzakis presented him as a superman.

The study aims to prove that Nikos Kazantzakis in his novel *Zorba The Greek* makes his protagonist Zorba like Nietzsche's hero Zarathustra in his book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. In these two books, Zarathustra and Zorba are presented as supermen. The superman or the overman, or the- man-to come is a special person who enjoys special characteristics. Nietzsche believes that the status of the superman exists in a high realm and if one wants to reach that degree he has to overcome himself. (1965, 21). This means that self-overcoming is an essential step for one to be the man of the future or the man-to-come. From here, Nietzsche believes that the overman is "the meaning of the earth"(as cited in Mcdaniel, 1965,

21), so the superman devotes himself for the worldly pleasures and condemns those who place faith in non -earthly hopes.

### **The Superman In Nietzsche's Philosophy**

In his philosophy, Nietzsche makes a distinction between two types of men; the superman and the ultimate man. The superman keeps working upon himself in order to reach a better position; he looks on everything and tries to change it. According to the superman nothing is fixed, static, or sacred, but everything upon earth is subject to be deconstructed, this thought is the outcome of Nietzsche's suspicious philosophy. The second type represents the ultimate man, in contrast with the superman, the ultimate man fixes all things in their places as they are, he does not have a tendency to move anything, so everything is static and unmoving, in other words the ultimate man, according to Nietzsche, equals death. (1965, 21-22). As Lampert states that the overman is in a constant state of renewing himself as he doesn't believe in fixity. In every phase of his life he has newness which gives meaning to his life. The superman is the maker of new people loyal to the earth; who doesn't follow conventional routes but paves the way for a new life by creating new sets of values and standards (1986, 263).

### **The Image of the Superman in Zorba The Greek**

In Nietzsche's point of view, the ultimate man leaves everything static since he fears chaos above all else, one can understand that chaos is the reason for change and accordingly the reason for creativity. Nietzsche's Zarathustra says "one must have chaos in one, to give birth to a dancing star". (as cited in McDaniel, 1965, 21) . The ultimate man preserves everything and preserves himself at all costs, he fears sacrifices and risks unlike the overman who is willing to sacrifice anything even his body or organs. The process of sacrificing is a must in the superman's life since it represents the basic foundation for the process of self- overcoming. Zarathustra says that the overman does not want to preserve himself but to overcome himself. (1965, 21) This aspect appears clearly in *Zorba the Greek*, Zorba sacrifices his body as he cuts off his finger since it stands as an obstacle in his way of creativity :

"Well ? I asked. What about your finger ?" . " Oh it got in my way in the wheel. It always got plump in the middle of things and upset my plans. So one day I seized a Hatchet....." . " did it hurt you ? " " what d'you mean ? I'm not a tree trunk. I'm a Man. Of course it hurt me. But it got in my way at the wheel, so I cut it off." (1952, 18)

The superman creates an aphorism to his life, that is , " we must sacrifice ourselves for the sake of ourselves – our future selves" (1965, 59). Every man is suspended over the abyss between the ultimate man and the superman so he either escapes to the realm of the superman or the abyss will swallow him (1965, 22) .The abyss here refers to existentialism, this means that when the overman asserts and affirms himself, he saves himself from the nihilistic mood of existentialism. So, Nietzsche puts the idea of the superman as a sufficient remedy to nihilism, therefore, the superman believes that the only ultimate and true reality is the human ego which represents the standard for everything. (1965, 23)

If anyone wants to be a superman, he has to undergo three modes of change or metamorphosis .They are: the camel, the lion, and the child. (1965, 22-23) Firstly, he turns into a camel when he endures the difficulties of life and does not complain of hardship. This feature is achieved in Zorba's character, as he mentions to his friend (the narrator) that he got various jobs in his early life, this indicates that he challenged his life so he is like a camel, the beast of burden which is able to endure also humility. Zorba says:"... The trades I'd learned – quarrier, miner, pedlar, padder, comitadji, santuri

player, pass-tempo hawker, blacksmith, smuggler- how I'd been shoved into prison; how I escaped, how I arrived in Russia" (73). And when they first met the boss asked: "What kind of work do you do?" I asked. "All kinds. With feet, hands or head- all of them. It'd be the limit if we chose what we did!" (10).

In the second phase, the superman becomes a lion. He refuses anything that comes outside himself, he does what pleases him and turns a deaf ear to the social system which imposes itself upon people's life. It is the superman who answers the command 'you shall' with a sacred no, and actually this is the spirit of the lion. Zorba is a lion because he denounced the social code and traveled everywhere to construct his personality as he desires. This suggests that the superman has an obsession with freedom: "I'm going to make a jug, I'm going to make a plate, I'm going to make a lamp and The devil knows what more! That's you Might call being a man: freedom!" (18). In another incident, the lion's spirit appears in Zorba when he says to his boss: "why! why! he exclaimed with disdain. Can't a man do anything without a why? Just like that because he wants to?" (10).

Lastly, the overman changes himself into a child, this phase is built upon the concepts of innocence and forgetfulness, the superman every now and then witnesses a new beginning, he dies as a person he used to be and is reborn as a new one, he says yes to every new existence and sees things as if for the first time:

"What is that mystery?" He asks. "what is a woman, And why does she turn our head Just tell me, I ask you, what is the meaning of that?" He interrogates himself with the same amazement when he sees a man, a tree in blossom, a glass of cold water. Zorba sees every thing every day as if for the first time. (51)

Nietzsche thinks that the overman is the one who takes into consideration the demands of the body and the demands of the soul, he does not emphasize one aspect at the expense of the other since Nietzsche insists on the idea that who focuses on one aspect and ignores the other, sees only half of the picture but the superman seeks wholeness and tries to create a balance between the Apollonian and Dionysian ways of life (1986, 256). Zorba emphasizes the Dionysian life as he enjoys food, wine and women, his life is deeply rooted in the earth and in the earthly pleasures. Zorba tells his boss about man that he is "a great brute and a god" (24) which indicates that man is a combination of the Apollonian and Dionysian demands.

Zorba gives examples of his gratification of his instincts. His friend asks him how many times he got married and Zorba replies "How many times?" He said at last. "Honestly once, once and for all. Half- honestly twice. Dishonestly a thousand, two thousand, three thousand times. How d'you expect me to reckon it?" (81). Regarding his joys in eating and drinking the narrator says: "he ate voraciously, tipped up the calabash, and the red wine gurgled down his throat without the calabash touching his lips. Zorba clicked his tongue, he was satisfied". (72)

Then Zorba refers to the importance of creating a balance between the Apollonian and the Dionysian lives since in the healthy body they have to go hand in hand and the existence of one works like a catalyst for the other and this leads to an active self-assertion. Zorba says to his boss: "if the slope is too steep," he explained to me, "we are dished. We must find the exact slope. And for that, boss, we need some brains and wine" (76). Then as a result of Zorba's teaching the narrator says: "I at last realized that eating was a spiritual function and that meat, bread and wine were the raw materials from which the mind is made." (66)

In his control over the earthly and spiritual needs, Zorba reflects Nietzsche's strife to state such peace. Nietzsche believes that the balance between the Apollonian and Dionysian lives brings " metaphysical solace", sustains life, and produces the true art which justifies the world and which makes the " horror of existence " bearable (1965, 12). The narrator says : " I should fill my soul with flesh. I should fill my flesh with soul. In fact, I should reconcile at last within me the two eternal antagonist (74)."

Referring the abyss of life, life is full of worries ; so one might sink in this a abyss, but if he looks for certain strategies , he will find an outlet for himself. Such strategies are like music, dancing and laughter. There are many separated things within the soul, and music helps one overcome this condition. Music, dancing, and laughter creat a harmonious mood at the self and subvert the disgust of life. Music also controls the Dionysain mind and permits one to transcend his individuality (1965, 62) Nietzsche's Zarathustra declares that he would not believe in a god who could not dance! so, this reflects Nietzsche's focus on the celebration of the earth, the body, and human capacity for creativity. Music, dance, and songs creat an effective way for communication among human beings who sometimes try to convey and express their feelings and emotions through such channels (1965. P 44-75) Zorba tells that he met a Russian man and they could not communicate properly so they resorted to music, singing, and dancing in order to understand each other

And then after that, it was my turn. I only managed to get out a few words, perhaps he was a bit dense and his brain did not work properly- the Russian shouted ' stop!' That is all I was waiting for..... I danced my misfortunes; my travels; how many times I had been married; the trades I had learned.(73)

In other words music, dance, and songs heal Zorba's melancholic status ; Zorba expresses this fact saying :Why don not you laugh? Why do you look at me like that? That is how I'm. There

is a devil in me who shouts, and I do what he says. Whenever I feel chocking withsome emotions, he says: ' Dance!' and I dance. And I feel better! . (72)

In an another occasion Zorba says : " When I'm feeling down, or when I'm broke, I play the santuri and it cheers me up. " (12)

Nietzsche is opposed to those who believe in external moral systems, morals from with-out and believes in virtues which are based upon nonearthly world. Nietzsche thinks that such belief in puplic social morals leads to sickness and self-destruction. The man who rejects the outside morals prepares himself for the step of overcoming himself. So, he is in his way to become a superman.The superman builds his virtues upon his passions, therefore, the self becomes the source of his morals and virtues (1965, 24).

According to Nietzsche those who believe in external moral system have conflict with themselves because there is always an opposition between their desires and these morals, so they are perplexed and agitated but the superman lives a balanced life, nothing stands in his way and he has the ability to unify the parts of his psyche. (1965, 24)

Nietzsche calls for creating values from naturalistic ground which gives freedom to the whole humanity, but criminality exists outside Nietzsche's moral system, this leads to the conclusion that there should be moral cods as many as there are persons (" Nietzsche's idea of an overman", n.d.). Creating values leads to the process of creativaity but still creating values demands a certain degree of bravery since every creation involves a degree of destruction, in such case the

presence of power is needed to sustain the new creative values so this reflects the meaning of the will to power (1965, 29). The existence of new morals maintains humanity that is: when a person exists, new virtues are generated, but if the social values are one and fixed, this causes subversion of humanity since from a destructive point of view fixity equals death.

Nietzsche argues that the social moral system restricts the natural instincts inside people. He proposes that such instincts, if they are destructive, can be released in a non destructive way, we have to find channels for these desires, otherwise we destroy ourselves, the process of allowing the natural instincts to express themselves undestructively has been called "sublimation", perhaps Nietzsche here criticizes the Christian creed which pays overemphasis upon spirituality (1965, 30)

The overman creates his own ethics since he does not believe in any kind of authorities, therefore, the superman strongly believes in the death of god, he is the god of himself and does what fits his personality, nothing imposes commands on him other than his ego. Zorba says:

No I do not believe in anything. How many times must I tell you that? I don not believe in anything or anyone, only in Zorba. Not because Zorba is better than others, not at all, not a little bit! He is a brute like the rest! But I believe in Zorba because he is the only being I have in my power, the only one I know. All the rest are ghosts. I see with these eyes. I hear with these ears, I digest with these guts. All the rest are ghosts, I tell you. when I die, everything will die. The whole Zorbatic world will go to the bottom!. (54)

When Zorba's brother sent a letter to him to inform Zorba about his daughter's lover and baby, Zorba did not get angry since it is something natural to him, they live their lives as they wish but not as the society desires, the moral system has no significance for him. The boss says: "certainly, to him telegraphy, steamships and engines, current morality and religion must have appeared like rusty old rifles, his mind progressed much faster than the world" (17).

The overman asserts himself in every aspect of his life, his ego represents a top priority for him, but this does not mean that the superman is ego centric. He affirms himself, but at the same time makes great benefits for others, so he is like a pregnant woman who takes care of herself but at the end she delivers a baby. Some sees this kind of egoism as enlightened egoism through which one takes and gives, hence the overman works on increasing the richness of his soul which is like a tree absorbs its nourishment from the soil in order to bestow fruits upon others, or like the sun which sends its rays since it can not help itself, and this is called the "bestowing virtue", such process keeps the superman alive. The other kind of selfishness is dangerous since it consists only in mere taking without giving (1965, 23 / 74)

Wilson(2011) explains that, the "bestowing virtue" makes the superman a creator and a giver, a herald and a healer, the result is that his body becomes elevated, his heart is full, so he lives at peace with himself and this represents a point of departure to the superman who serves and saves humanity. (3- 5). Since the superman loves man and Zorba is an example of such superman, he works in a mine to support his life, but also such work will involve many people so they will also make their lives better. The boss narrates:

He sat on the ground like a Turk and started explaining how he would set up an overhead cable from the top of the mountain to the coast; in this way we could bring down the wood which we needed for the pit props, and the rest we could sell as timber for building, we had decided to rent a pine forest belonging to the monastery, but transport was expensive and we could not find enough mules. So Zorba had imagined lying out a line with a heavy cable, pylons and pulleys.(75)

The superman has a firm belief in the doctrine of the eternal recurrence. This concept states that " Existence begins in every instant" (as cited in Mcdaniel, 1965, 62) which means that every good and evil in people' life will recur again and again. This doctrine has many benefits :Firstly, it redeems the superman's life when he gets rid of nihilism since when his life is repeated, he is given the chance to modify his life and in this way his life starts having a new meaning. Secondly, it defeats death since the superman will live an eternal life as that he lives his life again and again. Lastly, the eternal recurrence urges the superman to seize every moment in his life, also this gives him an impression that every moment is precious and represents a new beginning, so this life has to be built on many pleasant things and that only the best will be repeated (1965, 63).

On the other hand, Nietzsche believes that the idea of the eternal recurrence or return is something necessary as it gives the beings the chance to be what they are as they repeat themselves and when they reach the point that life is a fusion of good and bad. By this concept, Nietzsche turned the world of nihilism into a garden or heaven dwelled by beings like ourselves, it is more like a shelter for those who love life. Perhaps, man is sacred and that is why he is repeated (Lampert, 1986, 255- 256). The eternal recurrence appears in *Zorba The Greek* :

Our conversation was confined to the everlasting topics: The corn crops, the vines, the rain.... He had been, had grown up and had married. He had had children and had had time to see his grand children. Several had died, but others were living : the continuation of the family was assured. (57)

The superman is in a harmony with nature, this shows again his intimate relationship with the earthly pleasures or with the Dionysian life. He has overcome himself so nothing gets in his way, he enjoys a high degree of liberty (1965, 70). The narrator says :

African savages worship the serpent because its whole body touches the ground and it must, therefore, know all the earth's secrets. It knows them with its belly, with its tail, with its head. It is always in contact or mingled with the mother. The same is true for Zorba.(63)

## CONCLUSIONS

To sum up, Zorba is seen as a typical superman as he accords with Nietzsche's philosophy concerning the overman. After ending the tough steps of self-overcoming; he has achieved an intimacy with life to which he took refuge

and with which he got married. Therefore, Nietzsche's creation is intended to subvert chaos and nihilism which man kind suffers from, since his superman tries to give meaning to a meaningless world and hopes to hopeless people as they start looking at life from a different angle built on love of life, so they become finally creative, passionate, and optimists.

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